

Hunting in the Balch Hill Natural Area

Frequently Asked Questions

The following addresses many of the issues raised in the May 2016 survey on hunting in the Balch Hill Natural Area conducted by the Balch Hill Stewardship Committee of the Hanover Conservancy. For additional information about regulations for deer hunting and hunting licensing requirements in New Hampshire, please go to www.wildlife.state.nh.us/hunting/deer.html. For any situation involving a dead wild animal, call the Hanover police at 603-643-2222. For questions and comments regarding the management of the Balch Hill Natural Area, contact (603) 643-3433 or info@hanoverconservancy.org.

1. What is the purpose of opening the Balch Hill Natural Area to deer hunting?

In the absence of natural predators, deer populations in many states have grown exponentially. Attractive food sources in gardens and mild winters contribute to the problem. Overpopulation represents a safety hazard on the roads, causes destruction to local gardens and natural areas, and contributes to growth of the tick populations. Programs to deal with the overpopulation are evolving on the town and state level. While removal of all deer is not possible in an open landscape, and hunting at Balch Hill cannot remove all deer from the area, we believe that over time it can help as part of the larger effort to keep deer population growth in check.

2. Will deer hunting on Balch Hill reduce the number of ticks and the likelihood of becoming infected with Lyme disease in the area?

Researchers are still debating whether it is possible to reduce deer populations enough in an open landscape to affect the size of tick populations. However, it is important to note that although deer play a significant role in the complex life cycle of deer ticks (*Ixodes scapularis*) deer are not the source of the Lyme disease bacterium (*Borrelia burgdorferi*) these ticks carry. Rather, ticks acquire the disease from infected rodents, especially the white-footed deer mouse (*Peromyscus leucopus*). In fact, people are at risk from infected tick nymphs that have never been in contact with a deer. For this reason, making your yard less attractive to mice is an important step you can take to reduce exposure to infected ticks. Measures to protect against Lyme disease will remain necessary in our area for the foreseeable future. For more information on ways to avoid tick bites, see www.cdc.gov/ticks/avoid/index.html.

3. How is deer hunting regulated on Balch Hill?

Hunting in the Balch Hill Natural Area is subject to two layers of regulation.

- a) Hunters must be licensed by the state of New Hampshire. State regulations cover most aspects of hunting. For example, the state requires hunting license applicants to show a certificate of completion from an approved hunter education course. It regulates the number of deer that hunters can take and monitors the deer that are harvested.
- b) Hunters licensed by the state of New Hampshire can apply for a special permit to hunt on Balch Hill. The landowners (Hanover Conservancy, Dartmouth College, Town of Hanover) grant a strictly limited number of permits. The program is administered for the landowners by the Hanover Conservancy and stays in contact with these hunters throughout the season. Hunters must display their Balch Hill permit in their vehicle and carry a copy with them. Only archery hunting from tree stands is permitted. All regulations and procedures required by the state of New Hampshire apply.

4. Why do we see hunters parked in the area but not displaying a Balch Hill hunting permit?

Hunting is allowed in surrounding areas without special permit. These areas include the Trescott Water Supply Lands, the Appalachian Trail / Velvet Rocks area and Oak Hill. Hunters parked adjacent to Balch Hill may be hunting in one of these other areas.

5. What is hunting from tree stands?

For safety, this is the only method of hunting allowed on Balch Hill. Hunters construct platforms in trees and shoot down to capture deer walking below. Archery hunting from tree stands restricts the hunter to close-range shots with arrows directed down rather than out. New Hampshire regulations require tree stands to be at least 50 feet from trails. Hunters may not shoot within 300 feet of a permanently occupied home without the landowner's permission.

6. What is bait hunting and is it also permitted on Balch Hill?

The use of bait stations—corn or other deer food in special containers—is regulated by the state of New Hampshire and requires an additional license. During certain times of the hunting season, bait stations can be used to draw deer to an area. However, bait must be removed before the hunter can actively hunt from the tree stand at the bait site. Sites are signed, mapped and checked by the local conservation officer. In 2015 a few licensed hunters were permitted to try bait stations on Balch Hill. With the exception of highly regulated bait stations, feeding deer—or any wild animals—is highly discouraged by wildlife biologists because it makes the animals more vulnerable to disease, predation, and aggressive interactions with other animals. For more information on problems created by feeding deer, see www.wildlife.state.nh.us/wildlife/do-not-feed-deer.html.

7. How can hikers stay safe during hunting season?

Because tree stands must be at least 50 feet from trails and hunters shoot down at close range to capture deer, staying on the trails is a good safety precaution during hunting season. Wearing blaze orange is also an important safety precaution. Note that pets and children should remain on the trails with adults and also wear blaze orange. Please always access trails from main trailheads and look for information on hunting posted there.

8. Can hunters cut their own trails on Balch Hill?

Cutting trails for any purpose on Balch Hill is not permitted without approval of the appropriate landowner: Hanover Conservancy, Dartmouth College, or the Town of Hanover. Since hunting from tree stands does not involve movement through the woods, hunters would not benefit from cutting additional trails or shooting lanes.

9. Can hunters sell deer meat in local stores?

Health regulations prevent hunters from selling meat at local stores. However, hunters may participate in the statewide "Hunt for the Hungry" program, www.wildlife.state.nh.us/hunting/hunt-for-hungry.html.

10. What is the benefit of closing the Balch Hill Natural Area to everyone but permitted hunters for the first few days of the hunting season?

Archery hunters are permitted only one doe per season, and are often most successful in the first few days of the hunting season before deer become wary. Reduced foot traffic allows the deer to move more freely throughout the area. Therefore, closure of Balch Hill at the beginning of the season makes the area more attractive to hunters, most of whom have not yet filled their quota. In the 2015 hunting season, hunters caught eight deer on Balch Hill, five in the first four days during the trail closure period.